

CHRIST, the End of the Law, for Righteousness.

A

SERMON, ON ROM. x. 4.



*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness
to every one that believeth.*

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THE two principal parts of scripture, which it concerns us most to know, are the Law and the Gospel. “He who can rightly distinguish between these, said Luther, is a good divine;” and we may add, that he who knows how to use both aright, in an experimental and practical manner, is a good christian.

The nature and use of the law has been already considered. The proper effect of it is the same in every believer as it was in St. Paul. “I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.” The person brought into this state, will be put on the inquiry—How then can I come before God and hope for pardon? If the law be so holy and strict—if it can do nothing for me, but convince me of sin, and condemn me for it—by what means can I be accepted?

Now there are but two ways that ever were proposed of God, or devised by man; the one, according to the old covenant, Do, and live: the other, according to the new—“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Whatever ways and means have been thought of, by people of all religions, they may be reduced to these two—*Works* or *Grace*. And these cannot be mixed; for if any merit be allowed to

works,

works, there is an end of grace; and if salvation be of grace, then there is no place for the merit of works.

It is of vast importance to be rightly informed on this head. This may be inferred from what St. Paul says of the Jews, Rom. ix. 30, &c. “The gentiles, saith he, who followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith: but Israel, which followed after righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.” This, you will say, is strange! What can be the reason of it? He tells us, ver. 31. “Because they sought it not by faith.” How then? “As it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.” Alas, how many thousands, called christians, have stumbled in the same way! God preserve us from it! How earnestly did the good apostle wish for the salvation of his mistaken brethren. His “heart’s desire and prayer to God for them was that they might be saved.” He saw, that while they were looking for life by their works, they were not in the way of salvation. It is true, they had a great zeal for God, but it was good for nothing; it was founded in ignorance. “They were ignorant of God’s righteousness,” namely, this in the text; and being ignorant of this, and yet wanting a righteousness, “they went about to establish their own”—they tried to set it up, and make it stand for their acceptance; even their own poor, imperfect, ceremonial, and outward works; but they were totally insufficient for that purpose: and thus, through the pride of their hearts, which scorned to be intirely beholden to free grace, they refused to stoop, and submit to be saved by the righteousness of another, even of Christ, who is said in the text to be “the end of the law for righteousness”

ousness to every one that believeth." May God keep us from this worst sort of pride; and enlighten our minds while we attend to the three following particulars.

I. Jesus Christ, by his obedience and death, performed a perfect righteousness.

II. In so doing, he is the end of the law; and,

III. This righteousness is given to every believer.

I. Jesus Christ, by his obedience and death, performed a perfect righteousness.

"God made man upright." He gave him a law to be the rule of his actions, including a promise if he kept it, and a threatening if he broke it. If he obeyed the law perfectly, God would esteem him righteous. If he broke the law, he would be reckoned unrighteous. Adam fell; and with him, all his posterity. Our nature is now corrupt; and we are born with enmity in our hearts against God. "The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be," while it remains carnal. But the law is not altered. It requires, what it always did, Love. This was always due from man to his Creator, and always will, whether men pay it or not. If man refuse to give it, he is a rebel and an idolater. The law being ever the same, it thunders out its dreadful curses against every sinner, for every sin. But the law provides no remedy. It will not accept of sincere obedience instead of perfect obedience. It says not a word of accepting a sinner's tears for payment; or admitting his future obedience as a recompence for past sins. No; it constantly demands supreme love and perfect obedience; and condemns the sinner for the want of it in a single instance.

"But

“ But what the law could not do, because of the weakness of the flesh, God has done another way.” God has sent his Son to be our righteousness. As the law could not abate in its demands, and must have obedience from the creature, or punish the sinner, Jesus Christ graciously undertook to obey and suffer for his people; to obey all the precepts of the law, and to suffer all its pains and penalties. The law required perfect obedience of them: Christ came as their surety to obey for them; and so, as it is written, “ By the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

This blessed and comfortable truth may be fully proved from many scriptures. Take the following, 2 Cor. v. 21. “ He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Jesus Christ knew no sin. He was free from sin in his nature; that holy thing which was born of the virgin, being the Son of God. His whole life was as pure as his birth. He knew no sin in thought, word, or deed. He challenged his bitterest enemies to prove him a sinner—“ Which of you, said he, accuseth me of sin?” Yea, the great enemy, the devil, came, and “ found nothing in him;” no sin in his heart; no sin in his life. Thus was he the pure and spotless lamb of God, prepared to bear away the sin of the world.

But Jesus Christ, who knew no sin, was “ made sin,” that is, by imputation; it was reckoned to him; put to his account; in the same manner as his righteousness is imputed to us, or put to our account. Out of his great love to his people, he became their surety, to answer for their sins, and to bear their punishment. So the prophet Isaiah speaks, chap. lxxi. 4, &c.

“ Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions ; he was bruised for our iniquities ; the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all.”

The design of Christ's being made sin for us, was, “ that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” Righteousness is a perfect conformity to the law of God, without which no man can be saved ; for it is written, “ The *unrighteous* shall not inherit the kingdom of God,” 1 Cor. vi. 9. Now we are all *unrighteous*, because we have broken the law. “ There is none righteous” upon earth, in himself ; “ no not one.” And yet, without a righteousness, we cannot be saved. What then can we do ? Where can we look ? Only to Jesus. “ Surely shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness.” To him give all the prophets witness ; for “ this righteousness of God without the law, is witnessed by the law and the prophets.” Hear what the prophet Daniel says of him, chap ix. 24.—“ To finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.” All this Christ actually did by his obedience unto death ; and thus he became the end of the law, which is the second thing we proposed.

II. Jesus Christ, by his righteousness, is become the end of the law : for,

1. Hereby he put an end to the *ceremonial* law, or those ordinances, such as sacrifices, which were types or emblems of him. You may remember, that our Saviour, just before his death, cried out, “ It is finished !”—as if he had said—My engagements with my Father are accomplished—the types and prophecies

are fulfilled—my dreadful sufferings are at an end—the ceremonial law is abolished.

2. The *moral* law, or law of the ten commandments, was hereby satisfied and magnified; according to the prophecy (Isa. xlvi. 21.) “He will magnify the law and make it honourable.” The law must have its *end*, and be completely fulfilled, or we cannot appear as righteous before God; but we are unable to fulfil it ourselves. What we, however, could not do, He, as our surety, has done. The law demands a righteousness of us; this is the end at which it aims, but we cannot effect it: Christ has done it for us, and is become the end of the law, for righteousness to every one that believeth. With this the law is satisfied, and, like the avenger of blood, pursues the sinner only till he takes refuge in Christ; in him the believer finds a sanctuary, and the law retires, satisfied and well pleased for his righteousness sake.

We have only now to shew, in the *Third place*, That this righteousness is given to every believer; or, that it is by faith we become interested therein.

The righteousness wrought out by Jesus, is freely given to the believer; so St. Paul says, Rom. v. 16: “The judgment was by one (offence) to condemnation, but the *free gift* is of many offences to *justification*.”

If it be asked, How can the righteousness of another be made ours? We answer, in the same manner that our sins were made Christ's, that is, by imputation. Christ, who had no sin of his own, was made sin for us; reckoned as a sinner, and dealt with as such: so we, who have no righteousness of our own, are made the righteousness of God, *in him*—not in ourselves.

ourselves. The sins of the elect were not inherent in Christ, but put to his account; so the righteousness of Christ is not inherent in us, but imputed to us; and God is graciously pleased to deal with us accordingly: he treats us as if we had not sinned, and accepts us as perfectly righteous, so that there is no condemnation whatever to us.

The nature of this may be learned from the dealings of mankind with one another. We read in St. Paul's epistle to Philemon, to whom he wrote in behalf of Onesimus, a run-away servant, who was afterwards converted, desiring him to receive him again—“if he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, saith Paul, *impute it to me;*” put it to my account. And thus it is with bondsmen, or sureties, who make themselves liable to pay the debt of another; what they pay is imputed to the person for whom they are bound, and he is reckoned to have paid it, by them: and thus, as a plain man expressed it, “the gospel is nothing but good news—that a rich man is come into the country, to pay poor people's debts.”

Now this glorious gift of righteousness becomes ours by faith; it is therefore called “the righteousness of faith;” and “the righteousness of God which is by faith; and which is to, and upon all that believe.” Hence, also, we are said to be “justified by faith;” and “to be saved by grace, through faith.”

The person who has been convinced of sin by the law, alarmed by his sense of danger, led to seek for salvation, and enlightened in the knowledge of Christ, gladly receives this gift of righteousness. He sees no other way. He is pleased with this way. He receives this righteousness, and relies upon it for his acceptance with God.

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We must always remember, that the only person who can, or will receive this righteousness, is one who has been convinced that he is unrighteous in himself; and who is looking out for deliverance from that state in which the law leaves him. He hears the proposal of the gospel; assents to it as true; delights in it as good; renounces all other ways of obtaining relief, and heartily consents to be saved by grace alone. This is that faith frequently described in the scripture by receiving Christ—coming to Christ, and trusting in Christ.

APPLICATION.

And now, my dear friends, consider, I beseech you, the great importance of this subject. That great Reformer, *Luther*, said, that “*Justification by faith is that article on which the whole church must stand or fall.*” It was the pillar of the Reformation. It is the leading doctrine of the Bible; and it is an essential doctrine of the Church of England. In one of the 39 Articles, which you will do well to read, this grand truth is thus expressed: “*We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings.*” Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.” The prayer-book speaks the same language. Perhaps you may remember these expressions—“*O Lord God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do.*” Again, “*We lean only on the hope of thy heavenly grace.*” In another place—“*We do not presume to come to this thy table, trusting in our own righteousness.*”

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Take also a few passages from the book of Homilies. "Man cannot make himself righteous by his own works, neither in whole, nor in part; for that were the greatest arrogancy, and presumption of man, that antichrist could set up against God, to affirm, that man might, by his own works, take away his sins, and so justify himself." In another place we have these excellent words, "Christ is now become the righteousness of all them that do truly believe in him. He, for them, paid the ransom by his death. He, for them, fulfilled the law in his life." Once more, "This righteousness, which we so receive of God's mercy, and Christ's merits, embraced by faith; is taken, accepted, and allowed of God, our perfect and full justification."

Think of this matter with respect to yourselves. You must die. You must appear before a holy God, who hates sin, and has declared that the soul that sinneth shall die. Are you not asking—"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and appear before the most high God?" You have now heard. Not by works of righteousness which you have done. These are imperfect and insufficient. The best of them is mixed with sin. Trust not to them. Renounce them all, and say with St. Paul, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but dung and dross, that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God, by faith." If you trust to any thing else, you "frustrate," as much as you can, "the grace of God," and in effect say, that "Christ died in vain." This

is a blasphemy that you do not intend, but all self-righteousness speaks this horrid language.

But I hope better things of you, my brethren. I hope you are convinced of sin, and also of righteousness; that you are hungering and thirsting after it. Be of good comfort. It is the gift of God, freely bestowed, without any deservings on the part of the sinner. Pray to God for faith. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to produce it. Faith cometh by hearing. Continue to hear his word; and expect, that, in waiting upon God, he will enable you to mix faith with it, that so it may profit your soul.

Have any of you, my brethren, put on the Lord Jesus? Is he the foundation of your hopes? Is his righteousness the rock on which you build? the wedding garment in which you resolve to appear before him? I call upon you to rejoice. Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear. Blessed is your heart, for therewith you have believed unto salvation. Now you may say with the church (Isa. lxi. 10.) "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation; he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness!" Happy believer! go on thy way rejoicing. The sting of death is gone. Who shall condemn thee? God hath justified thee. Thou knowest in whom thou hast believed; and he will assuredly keep that which thou hast committed unto him. Wear this righteousness as thy breast-plate. It shall guard thy heart from fear, in sickness and in death. Yea, thus defended, thou shalt appear with boldness in the presence of God. Filled with holy joy and gratitude, let thy lips and life proclaim the praises

praises of the Lord. Prove to all the world, that the same faith which justifies the soul, sanctifies the heart; that this doctrine is according to godliness; and that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation, teacheth thee to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly, in this present evil world." Amen and Amen.

The Law and Gospel distinguished.

THE law commands, and makes us know,
What duties to our God we owe;
But 'tis the gospel must reveal
Where lies our strength to do his will.

The law discovers guilt and sin,
And shews how vile our hearts have been:
Only the gospel can express
Forgiving love and cleansing grace.

What curses doth the law denounce
Against the man that fails but once?
But in the gospel Christ appears,
Pard'ning the guilt of num'rous years.

My soul, no more attempt to draw
Thy life and comfort from the law;
Fly to the hope the gospel gives:
The man that trusts the promise lives.

WATTS.

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